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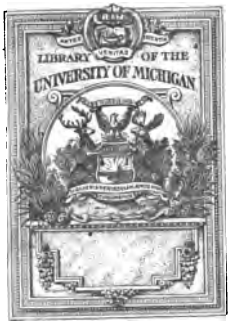

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What Business is For

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A PAPER

AT THE BUFFALO CONGRESS OF RELIGION

By CHARLES F. Fletcher DOLE

AUTHOR OF "THE PROBLEM OF DUTY," "THE RELIGION OF A GENTLEMAN," "THE COMING PEOPLE," "THE THEOLOGY OF CIVILIZATION," ETC.

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WHAT BUSINESS IS FOR.

YOU will often hear men say, "What do you take me for? I am not in business for philanthropy." So far as men mean that "business is business" and that it does not consist in giving money away, men are right in saying that they are not in business for philanthropy. But what they often seem to mean is that they are in business for themselves and for what they can get out of it. Business is money making. Success in business is gauged by the amount of money which a man makes. Is he a millionaire? Then he is a successful man. In a word, business is selfishness at work. The theory is that on one side a man is and must be selfish. He is bound to get ahead of other men. He intends to give as little and to get as much as he can. There may or may not be another side of his life where he is friendly and generous. He may be a kind father or neighbor. There is hardly any man who is not a philanthropist once in a while and towards some one.

The common idea, however, is that a man keeps his humanity and his business principles in separate compartments.

This idea of business is so common that many who think themselves socialists appear to conceive of a socialist commonwealth as a more ingenious scheme by which selfish men, still remaining selfish, may expect by pooling their interests to get more for everybody than they could get alone. As a modern trust is supposed to be a contrivance whereby a few selfish men may make more money together than they could make in competition, so socialism is often thought to be such a larger device for the benefit of the many. It is a "trust," in which all do business together to the end that every selfish individual may get more for himself than he could get alone.

So much for the idea of business, the chief end and aim of which is to get. Prevalent and plausible as this idea is, I propose to set up against it an entirely different and more comprehensive definition of business. I shall show that all business is so much social service. The end and aim of business is essentially to accom-

plish something for the social good. The success of every business is measured, not by what the individual gets out of it, but by the net social profit of his work when the work is done and paid for. The ruling emphasis of all good business is thus made to be to give, to contribute, to leave results. In the true sense of the word business is not aside from and over against humanity, but it is always the work of humanity. It is not dissociated from philanthropy, but philanthropy ought to be, and indeed really is beginning measurably to be, the ruling motive of business. Business more and more tends to become co-operative. But all genuine and effective co-operation is essentially philanthropic. We shall see that this proposition is incontrovertible.

I shall now use the word business in the widest sense, as including every function to which human beings apply themselves, through the performance of which they are justified in expecting their daily bread, or by means of which, involved together as we all are in our complex modern life, the great world of humanity "gets on."

I shall establish my position, first, with respect to certain very obvious cases where every one can easily see what I mean. For example, the business of the physician is clearly philanthropic, as a social function. What is the physician for, unless to help men and cure their ills and diseases? He is not here to make money. Suppose he happened to treat a rich man's son, and henceforth was pensioned off by his patron at a salary of twenty thousand dollars a year. Would this make him a success as a physician? On the contrary, if he barely got his living in some hospital and there ministered to thousands of poor patients, he would be a success as a physician; that is, he would be doing the work for which physicians live.

Take now the case of a teacher or a college professor. You never measure his success by what he gets, but by what he accomplishes. Does he really teach? Suppose he is a mercenary man; suppose any one can buy him; suppose he would teach what is not true for a price, or would stop teaching for a comfortable pension. Would you ever vote to make such a man a teacher of your children? Would a mercenary

teacher fail to train up purchasable citizens? Thank God, the demand grows all the time for teachers at least, who are not "on the make," for teachers who aim at one thing, namely, the best possible education of their pupils; for teachers of the same class as Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and President Mark Hopkins.

All the artists follow our law—the painters, sculptors, architects, singers, musicians, poets and writers. What is your great engineer for? Is his purpose merely to be paid? Is he a man to be bought? No. He plans and figures and superintends in order to give grand, solid, enduring, beautiful work. If his work will stand and serve men or please men he is a success. If his work is a disastrous Bussey bridge, though he were overpaid ten times for doing it, he is a failure and a sham. Who asks whether or not Homer was made rich by his poems, or Beethoven by his sonatas, or Michael Angelo by his colossal statuary, or the man Brunelleschi, who raised the splendid dome over the Cathedral at Florence? These men did the work for which they were appointed. Then they succeeded, whether they died of

starvation afterward or not. Shakspeare was able to buy a comfortable house and land at Stratford on Avon. Did this paltry transaction constitute success? Do you imagine that Emerson, or Whittier, or Charles Dickens would have envied Mr. Rockefeller? Do you imagine that Mr. Carnegie estimates himself a greater success in the world than poor Robert Burns? Do you mind that this same Robbie Burns will be blessing the lives of millions of men wherever the English speech is used, ages after all the overpaid rich men are forgotten? Let us call it thorough and magnificent success, then, when any artist does the honest work of his art. His getting pay, or titles or honors, is not success. His doing the work is his success, for doing which he was born. His business was never in getting paid, but in somehow accomplishing his art.

Shall we stop here and create an aristocracy of artists and professional men? Shall we agree that the business of these superior men is to give something to help and enrich mankind, while below them common men must follow the brute law to get, while they give and do as little

as possible? I believe in no such aristocracy. Here are millions of men who possess some kind of skill. They can plough fields, harvest grain, hew timber, mould iron, run machines, drive and tend cattle, build or steer ships, drive mines into the earth, make roads, load cars, and distribute every kind of product where a human need offers its prayer. There are millions of women who have skill to make and keep homes, to nurse little children, to sew and to mend and and to prepare food, aye, who have a genius for mercy, pity, peace and love, to comfort men's hearts and make the most toilsome life worth living. I say that these millions of men and women are not here, like so many blood-suckers in a pool, for what they can get; their business is just the same as the great artists and singers. Their success is the same. Has the brakeman, the sailor, or the artisan on the whole done the thing which he could do? I do not ask now if he has been paid for it. Has he done it well, and so that it does not need to be done again? Has he left a net profit for mankind out of his job, so that it has been worth while for him to have lived in this world? I do not ask the mis-

erable question, Has he got a comfortable living? I ask the human question: Has he been worth his keep? I do not ask the wretched and degrading question: How much is he worth? That is, how much has he laid claim to? I ask the one characteristic humane question: How much has he been worth? That is, how much better off is the world for his having lived in it? Is not this the sole test of the success in any business?

Some one may ask why I have not said a word about the business of the ministers. Partly because I never can bear to put them in a class by themselves, as if there were a department of religion aside from the rest of human employment. I hold ministers to belong strictly in the ranks of the teachers, the educators, the thinkers and writers, and if their religion is genuine, I should say, the men of science. I only mention them at all among other businesses because the test of our law seems to be specially inexorable for their profession. Less and less has the world any use for ministers who merely draw pay and a living. What a despicable profession it would be if the world were no better off for its existence.

Socrates asserted that Athens could afford to maintain him at public expense, because he told the people the truth. Jerusalem might have done the same for Isaiah or Jesus; Boston for Theodore Parker or Garrison or Phillips Brooks. Are you worth your keep? is the test to try every man by. Does the bee only eat and consume and bring no honey to the hive for the common store? They put drones to death. We men ought at least to make them ashamed of themselves.

I have purposely reserved several classes of men or professions. I have reserved the army and navy. In theory here is an absolutely unselfish profession. Soldiers are supposed to offer their lives for the sake of the common defense. What then is the success of a good soldier? Is it loot? Is it promotion and medals? Is Benedict Arnold or Washington your ideal? We say that the soldier who tries to save his own life, fails; and he succeeds, like Wolfe at Quebec, who loses his life. What an extraordinary opinion this is! And every intelligent man holds it. It makes the soldier, at least as regards the people of his own country, a philan-

thropist. The typical soldier's business is wholly social. It follows now that the ideal of the soldier fairly carried out, promises to put an end to his profession. It is everywhere coming to pass, and even in the United States, that the army and navy, except in the limited sense of a mere national police, are a vast and needless burden upon the people; that so far from being a defense of the rights of the people, they threaten to be made the means of injustice at home and abroad, Soldiers tend now to retard true civilization. Other and nobler means, namely, growing international good will, commissions of arbitration, and the new Supreme Court at the Hague, offer themselves to prevent and settle international grievances. Once it may have been a duty to volunteer to fight for the defense of one's country. A new humanitarian duty now arises to prevent one's country from fighting, to insist that one's country shall do justice and therefore not need to fight. In short, if altruism once seemed to make soldiers of men, altruism now forbids men to be soldiers. You cannot therefore make out a case any longer that the soldier is "worth his keep." Half of the money now

drawn from the poor and spent for our army and navy, expended in the means of civilization, and especially in giving better chances to the children, would make the nation so strong, so happy, so just and righteous, that no people in the world would wish to do it affront. Let the American nation, trusting to justice and international good will, dismantle every ship, and dismiss every soldier tomorrow. I honestly believe that we should be safer from risks of violence than we are today.

Another questionable business is "politics." Why should the office of a soldier be supposed to incarnate courage, unselfishness, and patriotism, while the "politician" is the synonym for concentrated selfishness? Why should soldiering be a generous business, calling for sacrifice, and politics be the meanest of mercenary businesses? There is absolutely no reason for such a distinction. "Politics" is the most abused word in the language. It really means the affairs of the city or the people; that is, the public good. What is a President, a Congressman, a Governor, a Legislator, a Mayor, a Councilman for? What is his success? Is it in "boodle?" Not

unless you rate Judas and all the rest of the thieves and traitors successful. Is it in getting a fat sinecure or finding places for mendicant constituents at the expense of the interests of the people? How far our American people are yet from Lincoln's idea of a democracy when men regard politics as a business out of which to get their bread and butter! No wonder great cities and states are robbed and misgoverned, as long as each generation of boys is brought up to suppose that men hold office for what they can get, and not for what they can give and accomplish.

What shall I say now about trade and buying and selling? Is not this kind of business purely money-making? I should like to know why trade should be out of line with everything else in the world which men do. A man manufactures pianos or shoes. That he has to sell them for enough to pay for his labor, so as to go on and make more product of the same kind, does not alter the nature of the business. It is essentially a branch of human service. The world is or ought to be better off for the manufacturer's enterprise. Success is not in the man's getting

rich. If he turned out a fraudulent product and grew ever so rich, he would have failed. His success, whether he is rich or not, is in his continuing year in and year out to produce standard goods which the world needs. Can any honest man draw out of the labor of the world more than he puts in? Which do you desire, to impoverish the hive, or to add somewhat to the store of the honey?

Here then is the rule with all buying and selling: Trade translates to mean the distribution of the product of the world. The trader helps me by bringing goods to my door. He binds the world together with his facilities of exchange. It is a poor country where no trade comes. The country grows rich, that is, we all have more, for every honest transaction whereby food and clothes and pictures and books are distributed more efficiently.

The test of the legitimacy of any kind of business immediately appears. Are you merely trying to crowd into a town and get business away from others? What are you in business for at all, unless your service is wanted and will do some good?

Here is the vast business in alcoholic drinks. It is a true instinct which is tending to make this business disreputable. Why? Because the people are poorer and worse off in every way for the larger part of the more than thousand million dollars which yearly go to float this business in the United States. How many men can say that they are in the liquor business for the honorable service of the people, as a man may truly say of almost any other kind of trade? The fact is, the only real success in the liquor business would be to reduce the traffic to a point where nine dealers out of ten would starve.

May we not say the same of the larger part of all the sales on the Stock Exchange? No man who has participated in them can have the satisfaction of feeling, when he lies down at night, that he has done a service for the world, which has left it better off. Some day we shall look upon all stock gambling as we now look upon the Louisiana lottery.

Does any one say that I am talking of a highly theoretical conception of business? The reply is, that we know thoroughly able and successful men who are carrying on the business of manu-

facturing and distribution, or ordinary trade, upon this conception. To use a well-known example, what else did the famous Robert Dale Owen do? There were never so many of his order in business, I believe, as there are now. I know of very successful houses where, if the heads of the business were elected to serve the people, they would not be more conscientious than they are now. The vast co-operative enterprises in England and elsewhere use millions of capital and employ thousands of men. Will any one tell me what else they are for, except to serve the needs of the people? If a doctor, a teacher, an artist, a scientific investigator, works all the better and more happily because his work is going to do some good to his fellows, if a man takes more pleasure in building a house or clearing a field because he will leave something worth while for those who come after him,—why should not a man in any intelligent and legitimate kind of business work the better for seeing what his work is good for in terms of positive human service. I tell you he does work better. His intelligence on this point does not make him less intelligent elsewhere.

I am not saying here that a man must consciously carry the social purpose of business in his thought every moment of the day. If I walk to the post-office, I do not think of the post-office every step I take. The purpose merely guides my way. So the social purpose ought to guide a man's way, being present in the background of his consciousness. If any question or issue arises, this grander purpose of his life controls his action and binds the lesser efforts of each day in harmony with it.

You remind me now that a man must have his bread and butter and enough for his family. I have never forgotten this fact. So must a horse be well fed and housed and rubbed down on occasion. I simply say that you do not value the horse for what he costs you or what he eats, but for what he does. So with an intelligent and civilized man. The difference between him and the barbarian is just here. There is no profit in the barbarian. He leaves the world at best just as he found it. Not till a man co-operates and lives with other men and exchanges with them does he begin to count toward progress and civilization. His profit in the ledgers of civilization

is not in what he costs or draws out, but in what he contributes above the cost of his keep.

What a man gets for himself in this world, then, is incidental. The emphasis is on the other side, on giving and doing--not on getting. "But why," some selfish man asks, "should I be obliged to put the emphasis on what I can do and give, and not upon what I want most,--what I can get?" Because this is a divine world, I suspect, and not a mere brute world; because it is an intelligent and humane world; because the strange, deep law of all happiness lies on the side which I emphasize. The truth is, even with animals and with children, this world is not so selfish as many imagine. The animal does not have his life merely in what he gets, but in what he does. in the outflow of energy, will and life. If a creature only had satisfaction when he was being fed or tended, he would not half live. The creature also has satisfaction when he pursues his food, when he builds his nest, when he defends his young, even when he runs for his life; in short, when his activity has full play.

Much more is this true with the man. There is a rhythm in life, outgo and income. The grand

ictus is on the outgo. When does a good actor, or singer, or artist, or workman, have the utmost satisfaction? Not in being fed. He may forget his food entirely. He is happiest when he is putting himself utterly into a beautiful piece of work. The selfish man has only one side of his life,—the paltry balance in his favor between what he gives and what he gets. He counts his debit as his gain. The true man enjoys both sides of his life. He enjoys his income, and his outgo the more. His income is for the sake of his outgo. The more you give him, the more he does for you. There is even zest with this kind of man in overcoming obstacles, in discovering recondite truths, in penetrating frozen or torrid zones, in throwing bridges across vast and deep rivers, in canalling through the mountains, in risking danger and popular clamor for the public good. Tell this kind of a man at any time what the larger good of his fellows demands and he is committed to try to do it. What else is he for? This is his life. Can a common soldier see this principle, and go cheering to death with "the forlorn hope," and cannot any workman, or any tradesman see it, too?

You know the common type of the individual man. He may be brave, truthful, courteous, just. But he thinks he is sufficient to himself. He is like a round stone lying in the field. All he cares for is to lie there and be let alone. I say that this is not the best type of the individual. The man is not yet a good individual till he has become a social or co-operative man. We want to take the boulder lying apart in the field and build it into a wall with other stones like it. We want the surface of that stone to take on cement and fit and match into its place. We want to keep the firm texture of the stone, its hardness, its endurance, and so make our building to last a thousand years. So with our co-operative man. Whatever makes a man strong, resolute, sincere, we want to keep. But what is there good in the man which is not the better when he contributes himself, heart and soul, to build himself into the temple of human society? The past century has gone to show in a wonderfully large number of cases what I am contending for, namely, that the coming man, the highest, matured and civilized type of man is a co-operative man, – the individualistic type and the social type combined in one.

This co-operative man is the man, the sole end of whose business in the world is to contribute, to achieve, to add the wealth of his life to the good of the whole.

We live in an age when various forms of socialism are in the air. We are as sure as we are of anything, that socialism must prevail in the end. Let us take good care to know what we mean by socialism. It is not an outward plan. It is not a mere Bellamy scheme of reorganization, in which government, that is the whole of us, shall take away from all of us our burdens and responsibilities and make everything comfortable for every one at the least possible cost. It is not an ingenious scheme by which, clubbing together, we shall get more than we give. Socialism is an absolvtely impossible scheme for any set of men who hope to get, and expect not to give. A socialist commonwealth run by selfish men, by the same kind of men who now run our trusts, only run by a larger number of them, the same men who run Tammany, only a bigger Tammany! Try this for twenty-four hours. Try it at home. Try it in a factory. Try it in a club. Selfishness is eternally divisive. It is jealous,

suspicious, quick to quarrel, in haste to quit work and divide the profits. Do you call the government of the State of New York or the government of the United States today a democracy, that is, a socialist form of government? No one pretends this. It has the semblance but it lacks the spirit; it wants the men. It is only an attempt to meet the need of humanity. Its very failure is a new call for the development and the education of co-operative men and women. Again and again so-called socialist or co-operative schemes break down and fail. Sometimes they fail because "business is business" and has inexorable laws. But mostly their schemes fail because the men in them are not yet co-operative or social men. They want to get, and they do not yet want, or know how effectively to give. Their desires and ambitions are eager enough, but their humanity, their skill, their intelligence, their modesty, their friendly temper, their good will to win co-operative success, does not match their exaggerated personal desires and ambitions. We shall never get a co-operative commonwealth, nor do we want it, without co-operative men and women. Neither shall we get the men and wom-

en until we cease to teach the American child the gospel of smartness. How long shall we set the Crokers, the Rockefellers, the Quays and the Hannas as object lessons of success?

I have already intimated that the idea which I have set forth is essentially religious. Let me make this clear. Progress, justice, order, goodness, the sacredness of the individual, the social sense—where do you think these words belong? Do you imagine they fit with a materialist or atheist world? They belong to the conception of a world where "men exist for one another." They imply a new law, replacing the animal competitive rule. The new law is—to live as sons of God. Can I say "A man's a man for a' that" with brown men and black men in view? I do not say that in Mr. Haeckel's world,—in an atheist's world. I do not believe it in such a world. I say it, and I believe it, only in God's world. Only in God's world, and as I realize the conception of God's world, do I feel any such zest and faith in humanity sufficient to stir me to treat the Zulu and the Patagonian as brothers. Must I indeed sacrifice and risk all things,—gain and profit and fame, and stop doing what

multitudes still bid me to do, – must I behave as a brother and friend on all occasions and to those who think ill of me, – must I live and do business as a co-operative man, and a humanitarian man? You all say I ought, that all men ought to do this. But this tremendous "ought" is a word of religion. It is a sense of religion which urges me to respond to it.

Many of us doubtless saw, in the Pan American Exposition at Buffalo, the latest and most beautiful of the achievements of co-operative man. No individualism, but only the spirit of brotherhood, of men working in unison, could ever have achieved the miracle of beauty that we saw before us there every night. It was a parable, and a prophecy, and a guarantee. It marked the way wherein all mankind, linking hand in hand in brotherly love, must and will win the world to the sway of justice and peace.